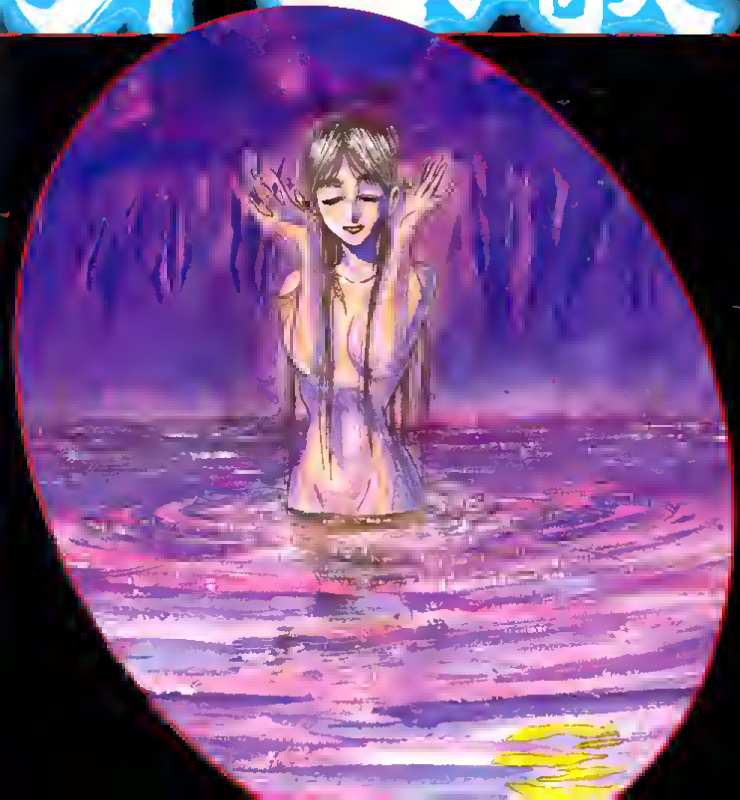
藤田和日郎 短編集

夜の歌



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小学館
SSC 3561

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Five stories, including his debut work, Strange Fairy Tale, The Puppet Princess, an epic, action-filled tale of a beautiful princess and a young ninja, and Shall We Go Out Walking by Night?, a bizarre romance that introduces the detective Sakuya Shuuhei. Fujita Kazuhiro presents: Night Songs, his first collection of short stories!!

I had reached a point where, no matter how I wracked my brains, I just couldn't think of anything interesting. This was sometime after **Strange Ferry Tale** won a contest, and after **To The Merry-Go-Round!** had been published in Shonen Sunday. I was returning, downhearted, from the Shogakukan building.

Then, the owner of my favorite cafe said something to me as she was serving me coffee. **"Things will work out soon enough."** Guhh...!! Thanks to that, I'm now at the point where I'm even getting books published. And, everybody. I'm so happy you're reading this. Thank you so very much. Guhh...!! I say that because, thanks to you, these songs will not fall upon deaf ears.

I like to go out walking by myself at night. Usually my thoughts aren't about anything worthwhile, but occasionally a story pops into my head. It's like hearing a faint song coming out of a house somewhere.

I like singing, too. But I don't do it, because I'm not good at it.

Though I can't sing, I can draw a little bit. I worked on this book very earnestly, and I had fun too. With some effort, I was able to complete it. I wonder what you'll think of these songs?

COVER DESIGN: MATSUYAMA YOSHIYUKI

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FUJITA KAZUHIRO'S
SHORT STORIES

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Night Songs

Fujita Kazuhiro's Short Stories: Night Songs

藤田和日郎短編集 夜の歌

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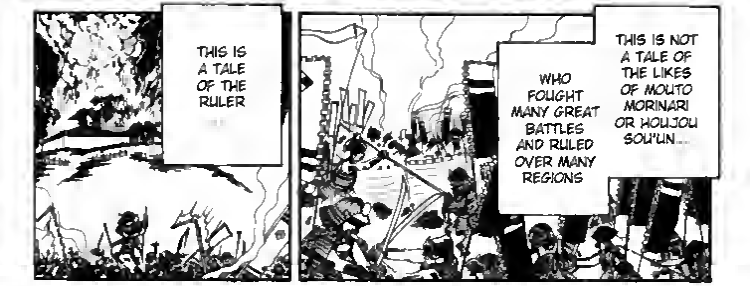
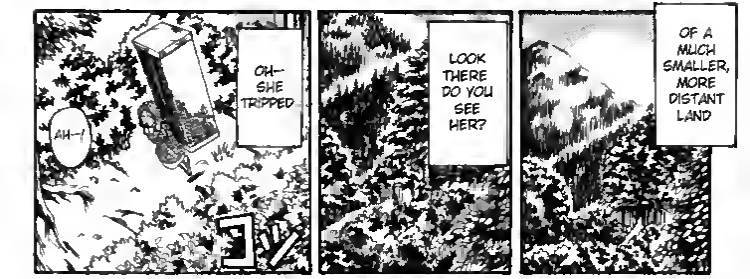
NOTES BEFORE BEGINNING

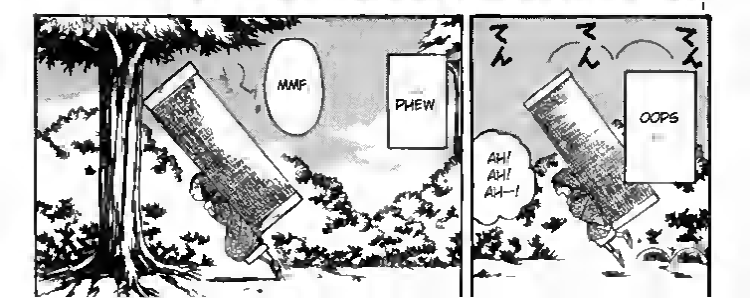
The word *ningyou* (人形) is used to refer to both dolls and puppets in Japanese. I've tried to make the best choice between the two words on a case-by-case basis in the interest of creating a natural-sounding English script, but there was originally no distinction between the terms used for the "puppets" controlled by humans and the "dolls" that function on their own.

Karakuri ningyou (からくり人形) are a type of wind-up doll (or puppet, if you prefer) specific to Japan. They were produced mainly during the Edo period, and were capable of performing minor automated tasks on their own. *Karakuri* can be translated variously as wind-up, gimmick, trick, mechanism, etc. The word is also used in this story to refer to the combat puppets that are controlled by strings. This one-shot was animated as an OVA which received an official translation, so I have used the official version of the title, but the Karakuri part technically refers to something more specific than a puppet. Fujita revisited this theme for his long-running serialized manga *Karakuri Circus*, the first arc of which contains some noticeable similarities to this one-shot.

からくりの君
LONG, LONG AGO
FEUDAL LORDS BATTLED ONE ANOTHER
EACH SEEKING TO EXPAND HIS OWN TERRITORY. SUCH WAS THE AGE OF WARRING STATES.

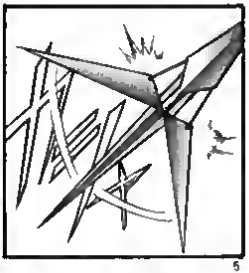

THIS IS A TALE OF THE RULER
THIS IS NOT A TALE OF THE LIKES OF MOUTO MORINARI OR HOUJOU SOU'UN...
WHO FOUGHT MANY GREAT BATTLES AND RULED OVER MANY REGIONS


OF A MUCH SMALLER, MORE DISTANT LAND
LOOK THERE DO YOU SEE HER?
OH— SHE TRIPPED
AH—!
コン

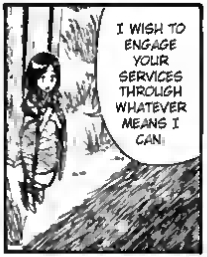

MMF
PHEW
てん
てん
てん
OOPS
AH! AH! AH—!

AND...
IN ANY CASE... THIS NOBLE-FEATURED GIRL IS CARRYING A HUGE TRUNK ALONG A MOUNTAIN ROAD
A GROUP OF NINJA ARE IN FLIGHT, PURSUED BY MYSTERIOUS BEINGS.
ON A MOUNTAIN NOT FAR FROM THIS ONE...
3
QUIET! WE GENIN CAN'T DISOBEY ORDERS FROM OUR SUPERIORS!
SEE?! THIS IS WHY I DIDN'T WANT TO GO SCOUT OUT THAT SPOOKY CASTLE!

SFX- CLICK CLICK CLICK



PLEASE PARDON MY INTRUSION
HELLO —?


I WISH TO ENGAGE YOUR SERVICES THROUGH WHATEVER MEANS I CAN!

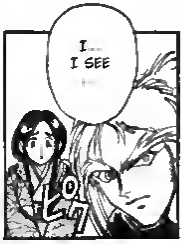
MASTER OF ILLUSION AND THE GREATEST LIVING SHINOBI
I HAVE HEARD THAT THIS IS THE RESIDENCE OF KATOU-SAMA

WHO WAS OVERTHROWN LAST YEAR BY THE FORCES OF KARIMATA SADAYOSHI!
I AM RANGIKU, YOUNGEST DAUGHTER OF AYAWATARI HISASHIGE

MORON!

YOU THINK A MASTER SHINOBI WOULD LET OTHERS KNOW WHERE HE LIVED?
OH!
YOU SURPRISED ME.
WHO MIGHT YOU BE?
JUST A CLUMSY FOOL... PRINCESS
BUT YOU'RE A FOOL TOO.
FIRST OF ALL, YOU'RE RIGHT NEAR KARIMATA SADAYOSHI'S CASTLE
YOU'RE REVEALING YOUR IDENTITY IN ENEMY TERRITORY! GOOD WAY TO GET YOURSELF KILLED!
OH!
6
THAT HAD QUITE ESCAPED MY MIND. THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR ADVICE.
WHAT IS WRONG WITH THIS GIRL...
THEY'RE BAD NEWS FOR YOU TOO.
BEAT IT! IF YOU'RE HERE FOR KATOU, HE'S DEAD.
WHAT?
THEY MAY HAVE CALLED HIM KATOU THE ILLUSIONIST, KATOU THE SWIFT KITE, OR WHATEVER... BUT HE WAS TOO SKILLED FOR HIS OWN GOOD. HE TRIED TO SELL HIS SERVICES TO TAKEDA SHINGEN AND GOT KILLED FOR HIS TROUBLE.
HURRY UP AND GET OUTTA HERE. I'VE GOT SOME REAL NASTY CUSTOMERS ON MY TAIL.

TCH... SO YOU'RE HERE ALREADY!


I... I SEE

THERE'RE PLENTY OF DAIMYOU WITH THEIR EYES ON KARIMATA'S CASTLE NOT TO MENTION
KEH! NO SHINOBI IN HIS RIGHT MIND WOULD TELL YOU THAT!

IT WAS YOUR BAD LUCK TO INFILTRATE KARIMATA'S CASTLE, OF ALL PLACES. TELL ME, WHO HIRED YOU?

"THE WANDERING SHINOBI"... THE LOWLIFE WHO WILL SERVE ANY LORD FOR A FEW COINS
THE GENIN WHO BECAME A MERE STOOGE !

HOW MANY OF THEM WANT TO LEARN THE SECRET OF THOSE DEATHLESS SHINOBI!

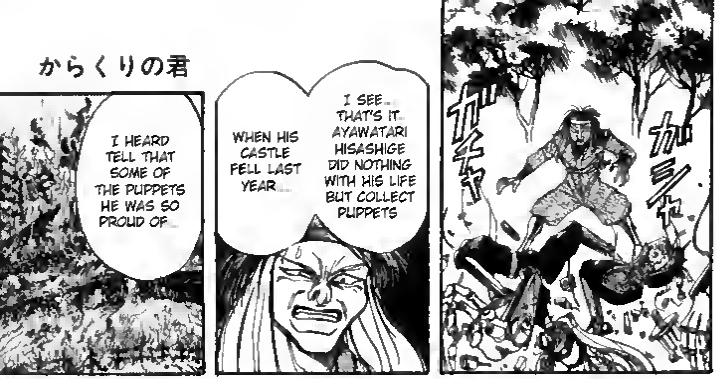
H-HEY! THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?!
HUH ?!
TO RETURN THE MISSING PUPPETS...
THAT THE PRINCESS WILL SOON BE THERE...
WHO ARE YOU?
WHEN YOU RETURN TO YOUR CASTLE, PLEASE INFORM KARIMATA SADAYOSHI-SAMA...
DON'T LET HIM GET AWAY! KILL THE GENIN!
YOU CAN'T BE AYA-WATARI'S ...?
PRIN-CESS ...?

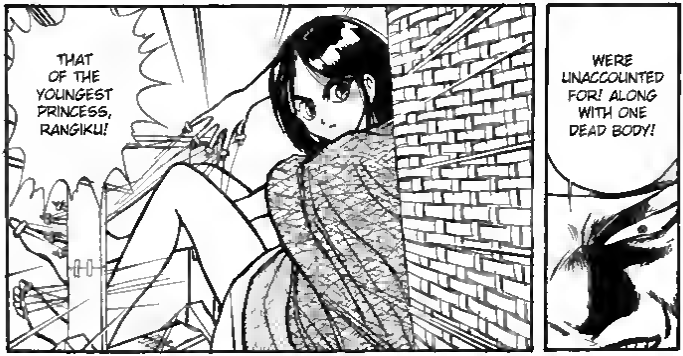
I CAN'T GET AWAY!
AN ARMORED WARRIOR'S HAND CAME OUT OF THE CASE ?!

TA-
ROU-
MARU
!!

フォォォ
キリ
キリ
キリ
キリ
WHAT IS THAT?!

IT'S A KARAKURI STRING PUPPET!
THREADS?! SHE'S MOVING THAT THING WITH INCREDIBLY THIN THREADS?

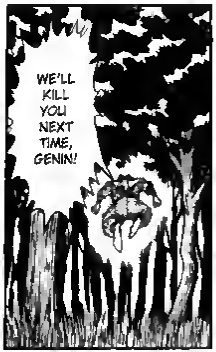

I HEARD TELL THAT SOME OF THE PUPPETS HE WAS SO PROUD OF...
WHEN HIS CASTLE FELL LAST YEAR...
I SEE... THAT'S IT. AYAWATARI HISASHIGE DID NOTHING WITH HIS LIFE BUT COLLECT PUPPETS
カラクリ
カラクリ

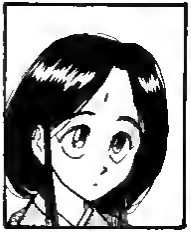

THAT OF THE YOUNGEST PRINCESS, RANSHU!
WERE UNACCOUNTED FOR! ALONG WITH ONE DEAD BODY!

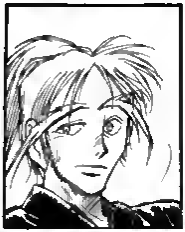
13

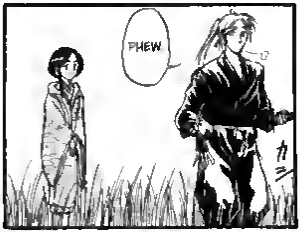
I HAVE TO REPORT THIS TO SADAYOSHI-SAMA!
DAMN!
!

THE NAME'S MANAJIRI YASABUROU! REMEMBER THAT!


WE'LL KILL YOU NEXT TIME, GENIN!





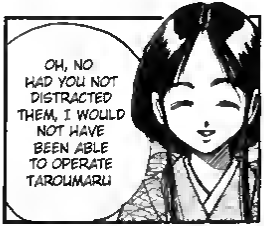

PHEW

YOU ARE VERY STRONG.

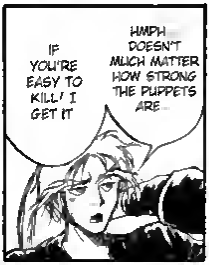
I'M THE ONE WHO GOT HIS ASS SAVED!
EXCUSE ME?! WHAT'RE YOU SAYIN' THAT FOR ?!

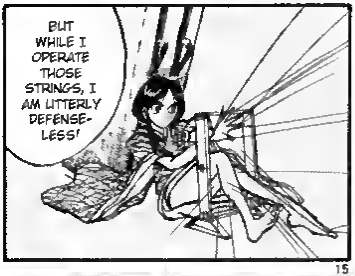
YIPES

カタ
THE PUPPETS THAT COME OUT OF THIS BOX ARE ABLE TO USE THEIR AMAZING STRENGTH
BECAUSE I AM CONTROLLING THEM


OH, NO HAD YOU NOT DISTRACTED THEM, I WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO OPERATE TAROUMARU!

HOW'S THAT?


HMPH DOESN'T MUCH MATTER HOW STRONG THE PUPPETS ARE...
IF YOU'RE EASY TO KILL! I GET IT


BUT WHILE I OPERATE THOSE STRINGS, I AM UTTERLY DEFENSELESS!

15

MUNAJIRI YA... YA-SOSUKE-SAMA!
MY NAME IS MANAJIRI YASABUROU!

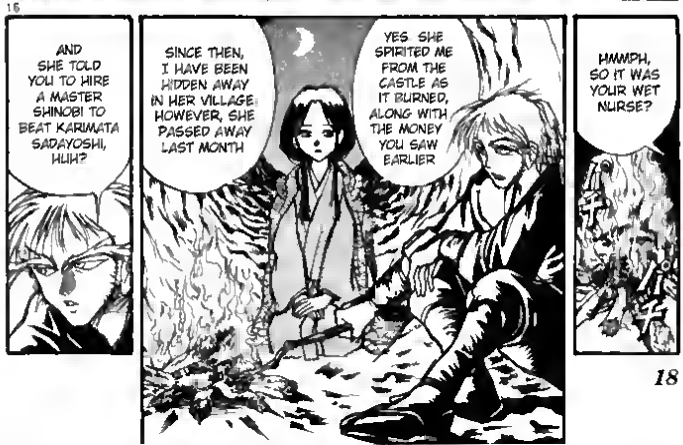
SO YOU'RE OUT FOR REVENGE? GIVE IT UP!

WILL YOU SERVE AS MY GUARD?
I MEAN TO RAID THE CASTLE OF KARIMATA SADAYOSHI.

WHA...
THEREFORE, I HAVE A FAVOR TO ASK OF YOU

I DO NOT KNOW ITS PRECISE WORTH, BUT...
THIS IS ALL OF THE MONEY I HAVE.
WILL YOU ENTER MY EMPLOY
ME-NA-JIRI-SA-MA?

16


AND SHE TOLD YOU TO HIRE A MASTER SHINOBI TO BEAT KARIMATA SADAYOSHI, HUH?
SINCE THEN, I HAVE BEEN HIDDEN AWAY IN HER VILLAGE. HOWEVER, SHE PASSED AWAY LAST MONTH
YES. SHE SPIRITED ME FROM THE CASTLE AS IT BURNED, ALONG WITH THE MONEY YOU SAW EARLIER
HMMPH, SO IT WAS YOUR WET NURSE?

WHY'RE YOU DOING IT?
SEEKING PERSONAL REVENGE IS WAY TOO AGGRESSIVE AND RISKY.
BUT WHY GO FOR THE GUY IN PERSON? IF YOU WANNA REVIVE YOUR CLAN, WHY NOT GO TO OTHER LORDS WHO'RE RELATED TO YOU...
AND ASK THEM FOR HELP?
YES.
DO NOT ASK ME THAT.
PLEASE...
17
HM-MM, WONDER WHAT I OUGHTA DO...
ぱたぱた
I BEG YOU...!
MANAJIRU-SAMA! IF KATOU-SAMA IS NO LONGER ALIVE, I HAVE NONE BUT YOU ON WHOM TO RELY
WELL, WHATEVER IT'S NOT LIKE I'VE MADE UP MY MIND YET TO HELP YOU, PRINCESS
……!
ぴくん
AND MY NAME'S MANA-JIRI!
SHUT UP! LEMME THINK, HERE!
I BEG YOU!

P-PLEASE EXCUSE ME
すっ
WHERE YA GOIN' NOW?
THERE IS A WATERFALL NEARBY. I WOULD LIKE TO PURIFY MYSELF
BEFORE MY BATTLE FOR REVENGE TOMORROW
I SEE
IT'S DARK OUT, Y'KNOW
ペコ
WHAT A WEIRD PRINCESS
!?
NOW THEN... WHAT TO DO
EVERYONE ELSE WHO WENT INTO KARIMATA'S CASTLE GOT WIPED OUT. EVEN IF I GO BACK AND MAKE MY REPORT, MY FEE AS A GENIN'LL ONLY BE...
ABOUT ENOUGH TO BUY MYSELF A DRINK. IN CONTRAST, WE HAVE THE PAY FOR THIS JOB...
SHE WENT OFF WITHOUT HER PUPPETS
AND HER MONEY... WHAT'S SHE GONNA DO IF I TAKE 'EM AND RUN?

HEH, GET A LOAD OF ME TAKIN' THIS SERIOUSLY!
!
I CAN JUST TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN FOR IT IF THINGS GET HAIRY.

BUT THEN THERE'S THOSE DEATH-LESS SHINOBI
NOT LOOKIN' FORWARD TO FIGHTIN' THEM

STUPID, SHELTERED LITTLE PRINCESS!

TCH

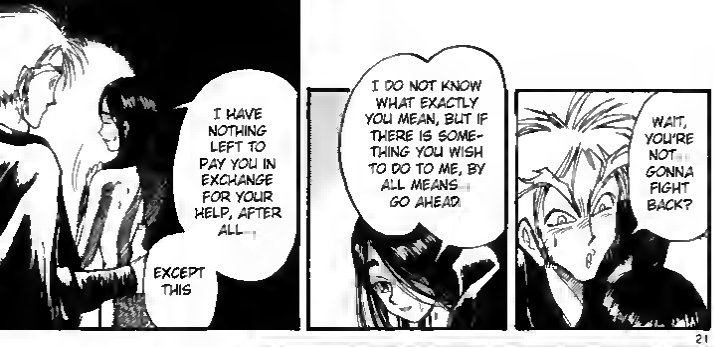
YOU'RE A FLOWER JUST STARTIN' TO BLOOM
WHAT A WASTE THAT IS!
YOU'RE PROBABLY GONNA DIE IN THAT RAID TOMORROW, PRINCESS.
IT'S MANAJIRI!
MENA-JIRU-SAMA

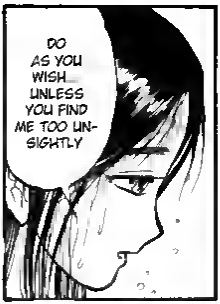
SO GIMME WHATCHA GOT!

JUST..! DO AS I...! TELL YOU...!

チュ。

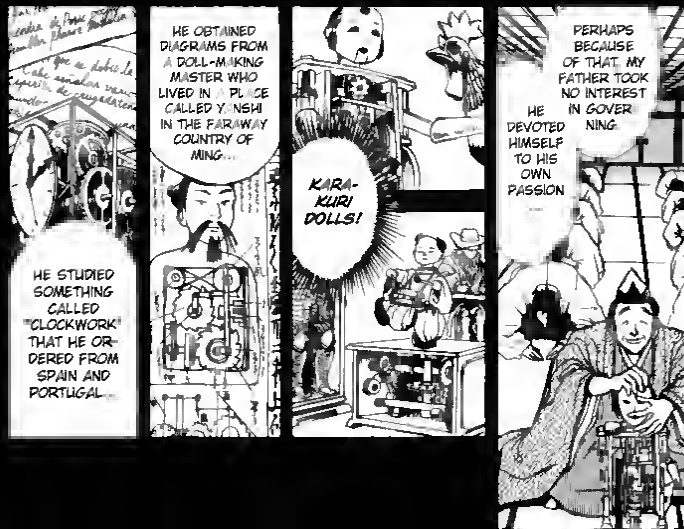
WE GENIN NEVER HAVE THE CHANCE TO GET TO GRIPS WITH A WOMAN OF YOUR LEVEL!
DON'T MAKE A FUSS ABOUT IT!


I HAVE NOTHING LEFT TO PAY YOU IN EXCHANGE FOR YOUR HELP, AFTER ALL...
EXCEPT THIS
I DO NOT KNOW WHAT EXACTLY YOU MEAN, BUT IF THERE IS SOMETHING YOU WISH TO DO TO ME, BY ALL MEANS... GO AHEAD
WAIT, YOU'RE NOT... GONNA FIGHT BACK?

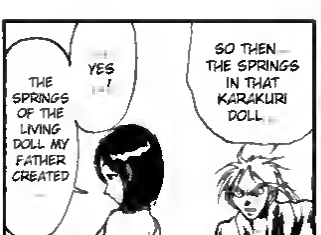

DO AS YOU WISH... UNLESS YOU FIND ME TOO UNSIGHTLY

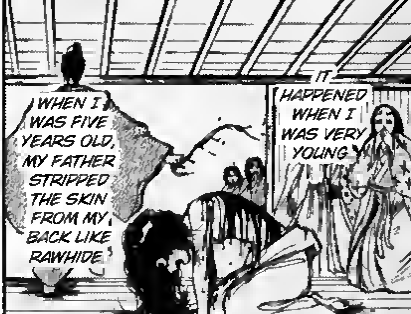
THAT SCAR...
THAT...

MY FATHER, AYAWATARI HISASHIGE RULED OVER A LAND SURROUNDED BY MOUNTAINS. IT WAS A WEALTHY REGION, WITH PLENTIFUL WATER...
...MY FATHER... LOVED DOLLS.
IN THE MIDST OF THESE TURBULENT TIMES, OUR REGION ENJOYED A LONG PEACE. ITS LOCATION BEING DISTANT FROM OTHER LANDS AND DIFFICULT TO ATTACK.
ALL AROUND US, OTHER CASTLES BURNED AND NEW LORDS ROSE TO POWER.


HE STUDIED SOMETHING CALLED "CLOCKWORK" THAT HE ORDERED FROM SPAIN AND PORTUGAL...
HE OBTAINED DIAGRAMS FROM A DOLL-MAKING MASTER WHO LIVED IN A PLACE CALLED YANSHI IN THE FARAWAY COUNTRY OF MING...
KARAKURI DOLLS!
PERHAPS BECAUSE OF THAT, MY FATHER TOOK NO INTEREST IN GOVERNING.
HE DEVOTED HIMSELF TO HIS OWN PASSION...

STRING PUPPETS THAT WERE STRONGER AND FASTER THAN ANY HUMAN...
MY FATHER INVENTED SEVERAL PUPPETS CAPABLE OF PERFORMING REPEATED MOTIONS.
A KARAKURI DOLL THAT MOVED ENTIRELY INDEPENDENTLY...
AND THEN MY FATHER CREATED THE DOLL THAT WAS HIS MASTERPIECE.
NO..
MANAJIRO-SAMA... DO YOU KNOW THE MEANS BY WHICH A KARAKURI DOLL MOVES?
AND THAT HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH YOUR SCAR?
MY FATHER'S DOLL WAS DIFFERENT.
BUT
ORDINARILY, DOLLS MOVE BY MEANS OF STRINGS MADE OF COPPER AND BRASS, AND SPRINGS MADE OF BALEEN.


THE SPRINGS OF THE LIVING DOLL MY FATHER CREATED
YES!
SO THEN THE SPRINGS IN THAT KARAKURI DOLL


WHEN I WAS FIVE YEARS OLD, MY FATHER STRIPPED THE SKIN FROM MY BACK LIKE RAWHIDE
IT HAPPENED WHEN I WAS VERY YOUNG

ARE MADE FROM A CHILD'S SKIN

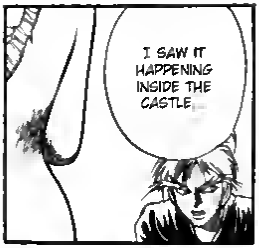
SO THIS IS THE LIVING DOLL BUILT BY AYAWATARI HISASHIGE?!

A YEAR AGO, KARIMATA SADAYOSHI ...
TOOK ADVANTAGE OF OUR WEAK GUARD, AND OUR CASTLE FELL

IF I BUILD OTHERS SUCH AS THIS, I SHALL HAVE AN INVINCIBLE ARMY!
HAH..HA! VERY GOOD! THIS IS JUST WHAT I WANTED!
ITS SWORDS-MANSHIP, ITS SPEED...! NONE WOULD BELIEVE IT TO BE A MERE DOLL!
FUHAH.HA! I SEE!

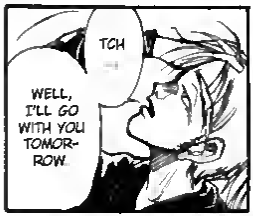
AND THE WHOLE WORLD WILL BELONG TO ME, KARIMATA SADAYOSHI!

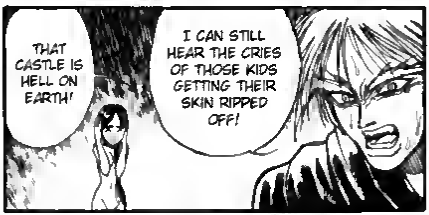
MOST LIKELY, AFTER EXAMINING THE DOLL, HE HAD OTHERS LIKE IT BUILT
SO THOSE MYSTERIOUS SHINOBI THAT KARIMATA STARTED TO USE AFTER HE BEAT AYAWATARI THE ONES THAT HAVE WON HIM BATTLE AFTER BATTLE...
アアア
I AM NOT FIGHTING FOR THE AYAWATARI NAME...
NOR TO AVENGE MYSELF ON MY FATHER'S ENEMIES
I SIMPLY DESPISE THAT DOLL...
THAT USES MY SKIN TO MOVE.
THOUGH I MANAGED TO ESCAPE ONCE, I AM SO LACKING IN WORLDLY KNOWLEDGE...
THAT KARIMATA WILL LIKELY CAPTURE AND KILL ME BEFORE LONG
WHILE YOU WERE HEADING HERE, DID YOU SEE WHAT'S GOING ON?
YES.
I CANNOT BEAR TO DIE WHILE THAT DOLL STILL EXISTS. IT IS THE ONE THING I CANNOT LEAVE BEHIND IN THIS WORLD.
BUT... MY SKIN...!


I SAW IT HAPPENING INSIDE THE CASTLE

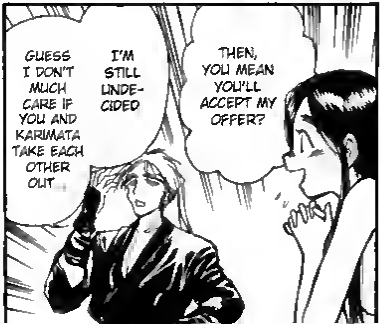
THEY ARE BRINGING CHILDREN BACK FROM CONQUERED TERRITORIES TO HAVE THEIR SKIN PEELED OFF FOR THE SPRINGS IN THOSE KARAKURI DOLLS

ヘ

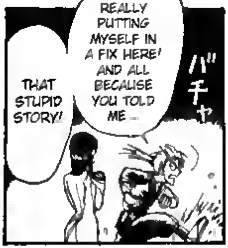

TCH
WELL, I'LL GO WITH YOU TOMOR-ROW

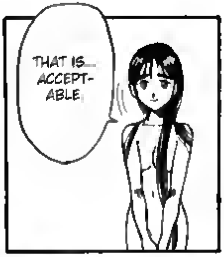

THAT CASTLE IS HELL ON EARTH!
I CAN STILL HEAR THE CRIES OF THOSE KIDS GETTING THEIR SKIN RIPPED OFF!

BUT IF I SEE DANGER FOR ME, I'M GONNA HAUL ASS


GUESS I DON'T MUCH CARE IF YOU AND KARIMATA TAKE EACH OTHER OUT
I'M STILL UNDE-CIDED
THEN, YOU MEAN YOU'LL ACCEPT MY OFFER?

WE CAN FINISH *THIS* UP AFTER EVERY-THING'S OVER

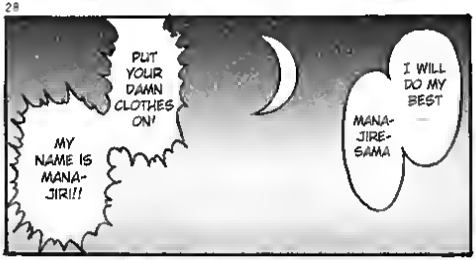

I'M REALLY PUTTING MYSELF IN A FIX HERE! AND ALL BECAUSE YOU TOLD ME...
THAT STUPID STORY!
バチャ


THAT IS... ACCEPT-ABLE

BUT I WILL TRY MY HARDEST!

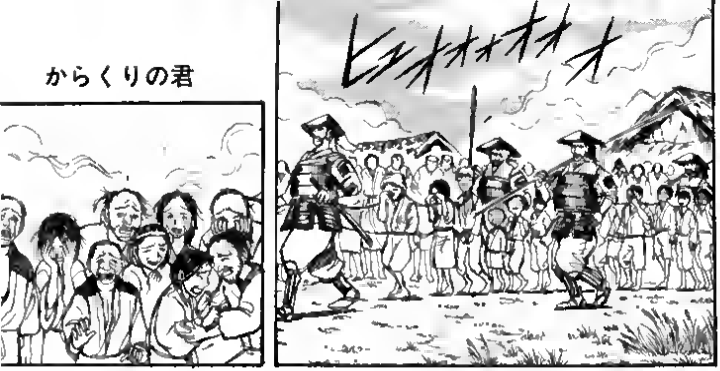
THAT IS TRUE... MY APO-LOGIES
YOU DUMBASS!! YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT I CAME HERE TO DO, DO YOU?!

I AM LOOKING FORWARD TO IT


PUT YOUR DAMN CLOTHES ON!
MY NAME IS MANA-JIRI!!
I WILL DO MY BEST
MANA-JIRE-SAMA

DAMN, YOU'RE NOT MAKIN' THIS EASY...

コオオオ


ヒョオオオオオ

オオオ
HM?
HURRY IT UP OVER THERE!

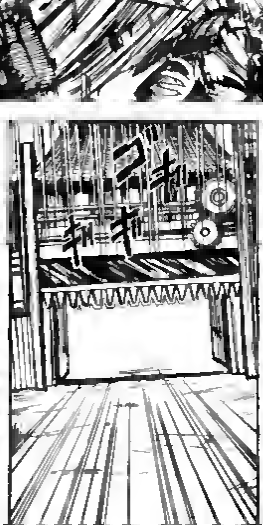
AND I MUST COMMAND YOU TO RELEASE THESE CHILDREN!
MY NAME IS RANGIKU
YOU MUST BE THE CHILD-HUNTERS EMPLOYED BY KARIMATA SADAYOSHI
WHAT THE HELL'S THIS GIRL UP TO?!
ダダッ ダダッ

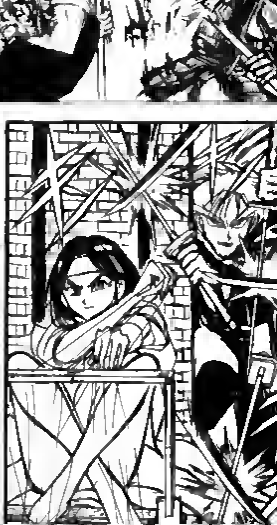
JIROU-MARU!
SEIZE HER!
AAAH ...!
GFF!
GWAH!

YES!!
LET'S GO, PRINCESS!
HERE THEY COME!
わあああ
INTRU-DERS!
きゅん
きゅん

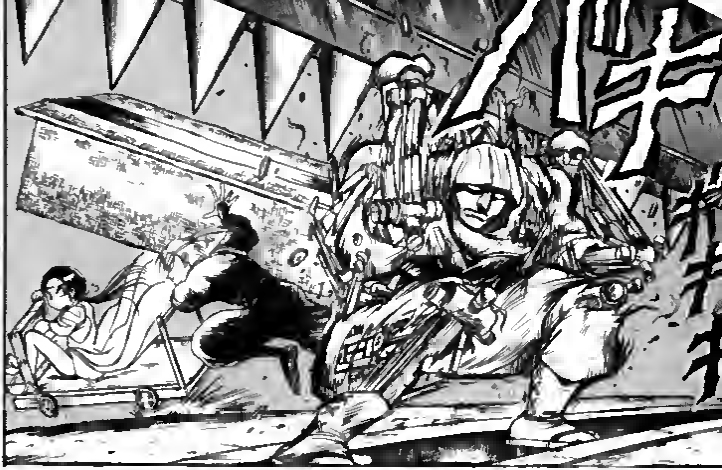
JIROU-MARU! TIGER RIOT!

WE'RE NOT GONNA BE ABLE TO GET THRO-UGH!


IT'S A KIRIKURI GATE! ONCE IT CLOSES ...



WE MUST DISCONNECT JIROUMARU! CUT THE THREADS!
BEN-KEIMA-RU!
33



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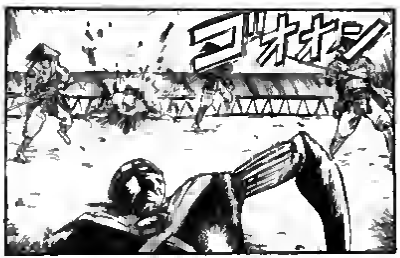
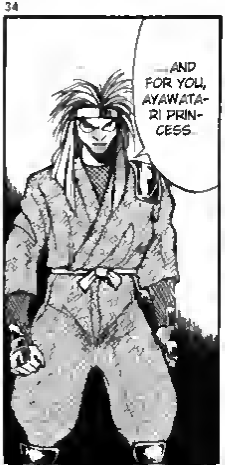

ヨオオン

34

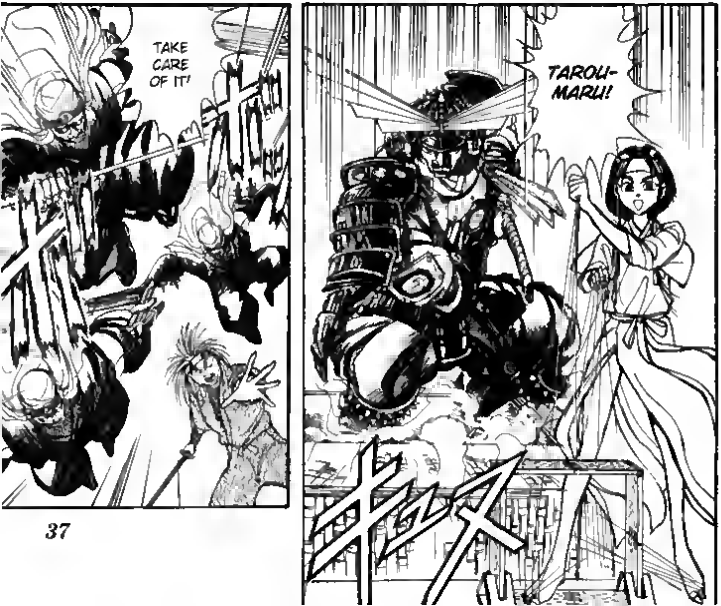

...AND FOR YOU, AYAWATARI PRINCESS...

I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU GENIN!

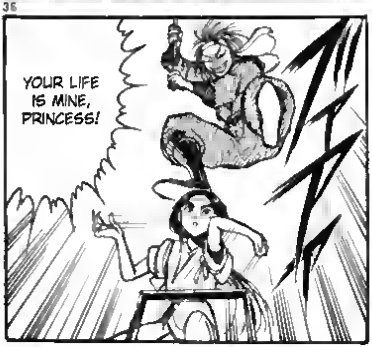
DAMN, THERE'S A TON OF THEM
BUT WE HAVE NO CHOICE

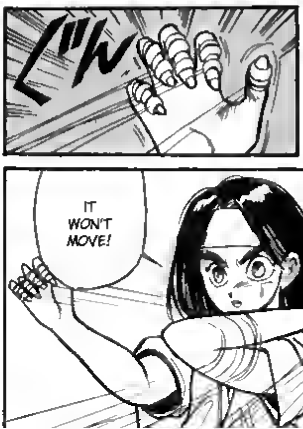
AM I—?
YOU— ARE YOU— ENJOYING THIS?

35

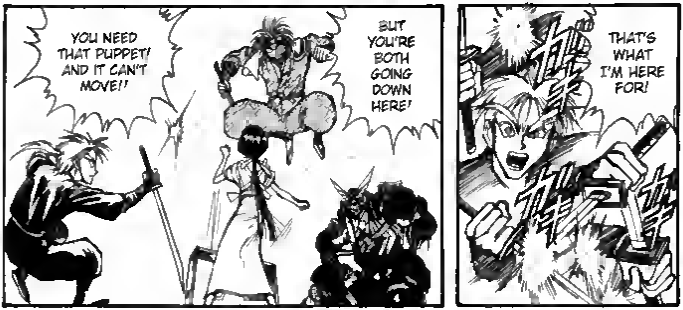

TAKE CARE OF IT!
TAROU-MARU!

HEH HEH, YOU FELL FOR IT!


YOUR LIFE IS MINE, PRINCESS!


IT WON'T MOVE!

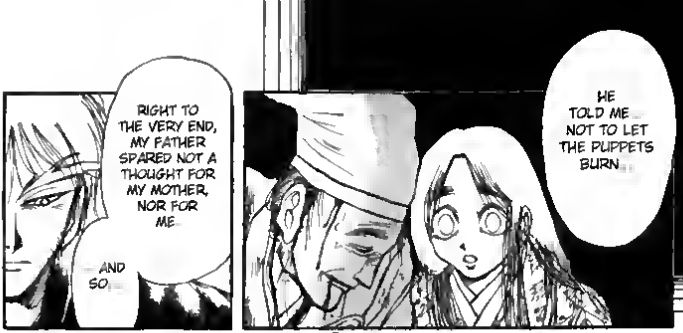
DON'T GET IN MY WAY!
UNF!


YOU NEED THAT PUPPET! AND IT CAN'T MOVE!!
BUT YOU'RE BOTH GOING DOWN HERE!
THAT'S WHAT I'M HERE FOR!

GET READY TO DIE!
THAT FACE SHE'S MAKING... WHAT DOES IT MEAN?
GRR
MANA-JIRU-SAMA I HAVE AN IDEA
WHEN I GIVE THE SIGNAL, LEAP OVER TO THE OTHER SIDE.

NOW!
GUN-POWDER.....?

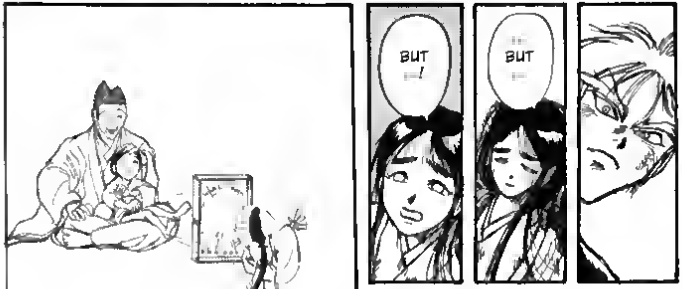
I AM A FAILURE OF A PRINCESS
I AM SORRY MANA-JIRA-SAMA
オオオオ
YOU DUMBASS! YOU WERE PLANNING TO DIE HERE?!
HEY! WAKE UP!
I..
I REALIZED THAT AS I FOUGHT
I NO LONGER CARED WHAT BECAME OF IT
THAT DOLL I TOLD YOU OF, THE ONE THAT MOVES USING MY SKIN
WHAT ?!
MY FATHER DIED IN MY ARMS
.....
COULD NOT HELP BUT FEEL JOY AS MY PUPPETS WERE BROKEN
DON'T... LET THE PUPPETS BURN...
...THE LAST WORDS MY FATHER SPOKE...
HE WAS FATALLY WOUNDED BY THE ENEMY'S ARROWS AS OUR CASTLE BURNED


RIGHT TO THE VERY END, MY FATHER SPARED NOT A THOUGHT FOR MY MOTHER, NOR FOR ME...
AND SO...
HE TOLD ME NOT TO LET THE PUPPETS BURN...

WAS TO AVENGE MYSELF UPON THE PUPPETS
MY REAL REASON FOR FIGHTING...

TO SEE THE DESTRUCTION OF SO MANY PUPPETS
HOW MUST MY FATHER BE SUFFERING IN THE AFTER-LIFE...
BUT I HAVE DONE ENOUGH
TO BREAK THOSE PUPPETS THAT MY FATHER HELD SO DEAR

40


BUT...!
BUT...

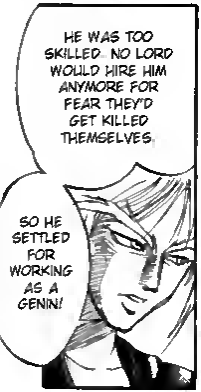
WHEN I WAS WORKING THE PUPPETS
FATHER WAS
SO KIND TO ME

HAHAHA! YOU'RE A FINE PUPPETEER, RANGIKU!

YOU'RE NOT ONE OF HIS PUPPETS!

DUMBASS
YOU HATE YOUR FATHER
AND YOU LOVED HIM, TOO.

41


HE WAS TOO SKILLED. NO LORD WOULD HIRE HIM ANYMORE FOR FEAR THEY'D GET KILLED THEMSELVES.
SO HE SETTLED FOR WORKING AS A GENIN!

THAT MASTER OF ILLUSION YOU CAME TO CALL ON
HE'S NOT REALLY DEAD.

Y'KNOW

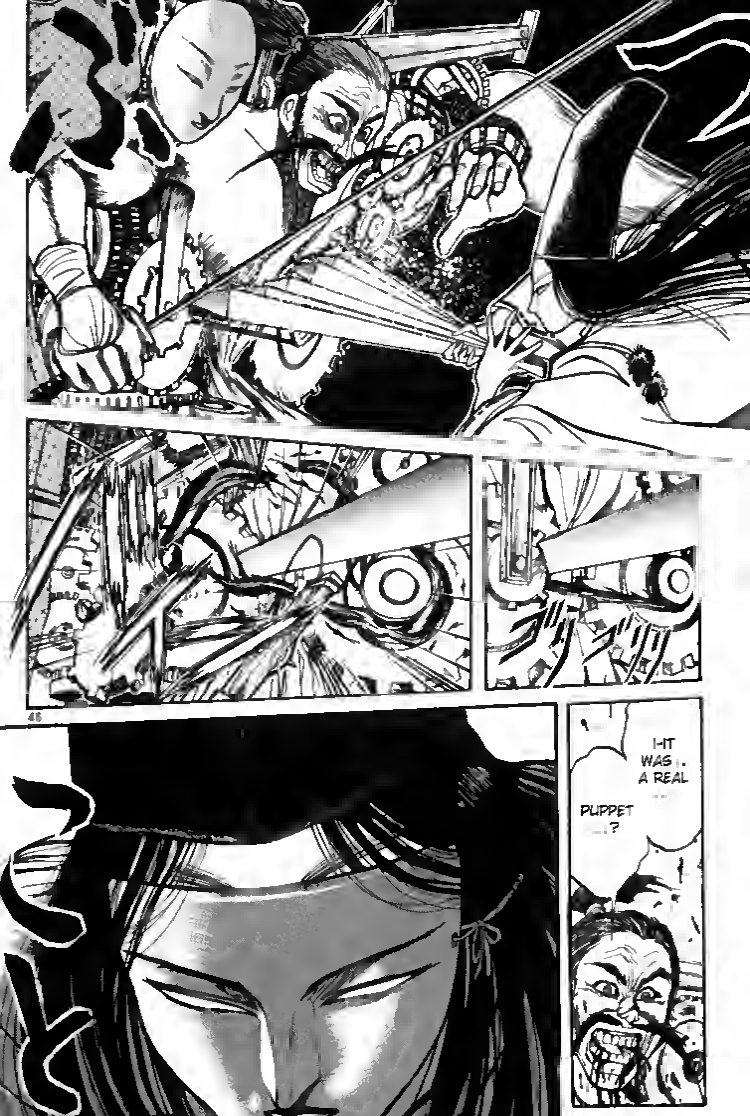
I WILL SERVE YOU AS BEST I CAN AS A SHINOBI.
I'VE MADE UP MY MIND I'LL WORK FOR YOU.
THEN ARE YOU SAYING THAT...
42
YOUR HIGHNESS...
BUT I REFUSE TO HAVE MY STRINGS PULLED BY A PUPPET!
A SHINOBI'S JOB IS TO BE MANIPULATED
DO YOU HAVE IT IN YOU TO BE MY RULER?
カラーン

BY ORDER OF THE KARAKURI PRINCESS
THIS CASTLE AND ITS LORD ARE AT AN END!
PREPARE YOURSELF, KARIMATA SADAYOSHI-SAMA
ALL THE WAY TO KARIMATA SADAYOSHI
SO THAT WORTHLESS LITTLE GIRL HAS MADE IT THIS FAR?

FOOL! THIS IS THE ULTIMATE PUPPET! DO YOU THINK THE LIKES OF A GENIN CAN DEFEAT ME?!
HERE I COME!

SAYS YOU'RE PITIFUL
THE LORD OF THIS CASTLE
KU KU
YOUR HIGHNESS
WHAT GOOD ARE HER USELESS PUPPETS?! SHE CAN ONLY MOVE ONE OF THEM AT A TIME! HOW PITIFUL!
WHAT GOOD IS THAT PRINCESS OF YOURS?!
WHAT CAN YOU, RESIGNED TO PERPETUAL SERVITUDE, DO AGAINST ME?!
I LIMITED MYSELF WITH THIS PUPPET BECAUSE I SOUGHT POWER!
44
SHE'S MOVING ALL OF THEM AT ONCE?!
WHAAAAT ...?!

DAMN YOU!
AN... ILLUSION ...?!
SIR... PERMIT ME TO REVEAL MY NAME.
I'M KATOU DANZOU.
KATOU THE SWIFT KITE...
KATOU THE ILLUSIONIST ?!
45
YOU WILL NOT TAKE ME IN AGAIN! FOUL ILLUSION!
NO.
I CANNOT CREATE THE IMAGE ....
OF SOMETHING I'VE NEVER SEEN.
WHAT ?!


I-IT WAS.. A REAL ... PUPPET ...?

I AM ...
NO PUPPET.
カチ
47
GAH ...
ゴゴゴ

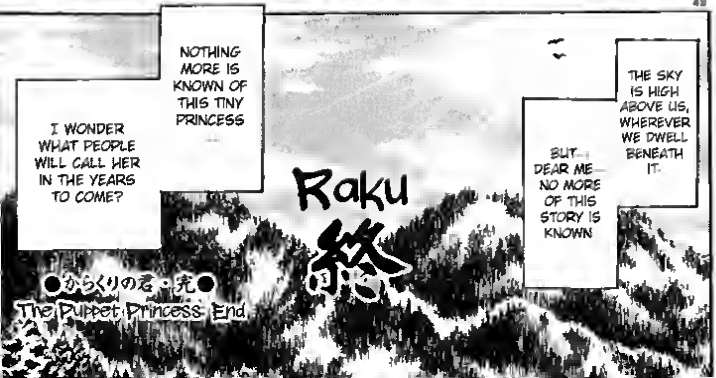
ER...
YOUR HIGH-NESS?
THE PEOPLE ARE AT EASE
NOW THAT THAT CREEPY LORD OF THEIRS IS DEAD, DO YOU THINK

JEEZ, IT'S BEEN BURNIN' FOR THREE DAYS NOW.

ABSOLUTELY NOT! A MERE GENIN I MAY BE, BUT I COULD NEVER SHOW SUCH LACK OF RESPECT TOWARDS MY RULER.

IF YOU WOULD KINDLY STOP CALLING ME THAT...
YOUR HIGH-NESS?
YES? WHAT IS IT

UH, RIGHT ...
DON'T YOU REMEMBER? THERE WAS SOMETHING YOU WANTED TO DO TO ME, KATOU-SAMA.
HUH ?!
I JUST REMEMBERED THAT PROMISE WE MADE AT THE WATERFALL!
OH!
ぽん
.....
I WILL TRY MY HARDEST!
WE MUST!
UH... NO, SERIOUSLY, THAT'S...
IT MOST CERTAINLY IS NOT! DO YOU MEAN TO MAKE A LIAR OF ME?!
THAT'S OKAY, REALLY ...
DAMN, YOU'RE A SLOW ONE, YOUR HIGHNESS!
IT'S MANA-JIRI!
MANA-JIRU-SAMA!
COME NOW, WE PROMISED!


I WONDER WHAT PEOPLE WILL CALL HER IN THE YEARS TO COME?
NOTHING MORE IS KNOWN OF THIS TINY PRINCESS ...
BUT... DEAR ME— NO MORE OF THIS STORY IS KNOWN
THE SKY IS HIGH ABOVE US, WHEREVER WE DWELL BENEATH IT.
Raku
終
●からくりの君・完●
The Puppet Princess End.

FINAL NOTES:

pg. 8: Takeda Shingen lived from 1521 to 1573. This most likely sets the story somewhere between 1542 and 1573.

pg. 22: *Ming* refers to China during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)

pg. 24: It sounds counterintuitive, but the original does specify that the skin is used to make the *springs* and not the *strings*

pg. 49: "Raku" is written with the character 絡, which is part of a less common way of writing *karakuri* (絡繰り, more commonly からくり)